

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Southern Caucasus Literatures –Postclassical Period

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POETRY

Georgian.

growth in Georgian literature The weakening of the Byzantine empire during the 10th provided an opportunity for smaller literatures like Georgian and Armenian to flourish. King David IV, known as the Builder (r. 1089–1125), and his great-granddaughter Queen Tamar (r. 1184-1213) two centuries later, presided over a period of remarkable growth in Georgian literature, particularly in the domain of poetry. Persian had by this time become the dominant influence on all literatures of the Caucasus, including Georgian and Armenian. If one specific work of Persian literature among the many that influenced the development of Georgian and Armenian poetry had to be named, it would be Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings (Shahnama)*, a work composed in the first quarter of the 11th century that was to become a source for narrative poetry across the Persianate world.

Rustaveli's Knight in the Panther's Skin Among the works that bear the clearest imprint of Ferdowsi's epic is Shota Rustaveli's *Knight in the Panther's Skin (Vepkhvistqaosani)*, composed circa 1220 in southeastern Georgia. Rustaveli's epic is remarkable on many levels, from its complex plot, which guides the characters across India and beyond, to its distinctive language and prosody, which introduced a new meter, the *shairi* (from the Perso-Arabic *shi'r*, meaning poetry), into Georgian poetry. Although *Knight in the Panther's Skin* was written to be read, it also shares features in common with Georgian folk poetry, including the use of slant rhyme, a fact that enables us to think of oral and written Georgian literature as comprising a single tradition.

Rustaveli's predecessors Every Georgian poet who came after Rustaveli inevitably wrote in his shadow, and many poets explicitly named him as their progenitor. *Knight in the Panther's Skin* has also impacted Georgian culture beyond the Georgian language, and has been translated into non-Georgian languages of Georgia, such as Svan, Laz, and Mingrelian, as well as into countless other languages of the world. *Knight in the Panther's Skin* was not created in a vacuum. Among the works Rustaveli mentions as predecessors are the prose translation of Fakhr al-Din Gurgani's Persian *Vis and Ramin* by Sergis Tmogveli, known as *Visramiani*, and the romance *Amiran-Darejaniani* by Moses Khoneli. Notably, both of these works are in prose, even though the first is based on a Persian verse romance.

Persian in Azerbaijan. Although Azeri was not regularly used for written literary expression until the 14th century, the region of Azerbaijan, which was then part of the wider Persian world, was the birthplace of many of the most important poets of the entire Persian tradition, including Nizami of Ganja (1141-1209) in northwestern Azerbaijan and Khaqani of Shirvan (1120-1199).

Khaqani Shirvani Khaqani's literary milieu of Shirvan, not far from the border with Daghestan, also included a number of lesser known poets including Falaki of Shirvan, Mujir al-Din Baylaqani, and Qatran Tabrizi. Nizami's father-in-law Abu'l 'Ala Ganjevi was also a poet of note, although the majority of his poetry is no longer extant. Although he left Shirvan for a pilgrimage that took him across Iraq and passed the final years of his life in Tabriz, where he died, Khaqani had deep roots in the Caucasus and often referred to it, mostly in negative terms, in his verse. His mother was a Christian convert to Islam—in the *Two Gifts from Iraq (Tuhfat al-'Iraqayn)*, his autobiography in verse, he suggested that she was kidnapped, enslaved, and forcibly converted—and scholars have detected

puns in his poems based on the Georgian language. Khaqani's Christian Qasida is a landmark work that reflected in poetic terms on the intertwinement of Islam and Christianity, while also using Christian theology as a means of criticizing the Muslim sultan. Khaqani wrote frequently about imprisonment in his poems, and is known for bringing the genre of Persian prison poetry (*habsiyyat*) to new level of poetic exigency.

Nizami Ganjevi Unlike Khaqani, Nizami never left the place of his birth (or at least he never wrote about any travelling he may have done). Yet the romances he composed, all of which were written from his home in Ganja, circulated across the Persianate world and inspired countless imitations in Turkic literatures (Azeri, Ottoman, Chaghatay, and others), Kurdish, Georgian, Pashto, Urdu, Judeo-Persian, and in many other languages of West Asia. Nizami married a Kipchak slave girl sent to him by Fakhr al-Din Bahramshah, the ruler of Darband, who died soon after he completed the love story *Khusrow and Shirin*.

Nizami's romances Nizami's romances belong to a type of Persian verse called the *masnavi* (derived from the Arabic word for "two"), which consists of rhyming couplets. Although the term *masnavi* refers to prosody of a poem, *masnavi* denotes more than a poetic form; poems that conform to this structure tend to be lengthy narratives that follow a certain pattern in terms of their themes topics as well. More often than not, they deal with love in one way or another, although some *masnavis* (such as Nizami's own *Treasury of Mysteries (Makhzan al-Asrar*, c. 1163) are spiritual or didactic in their orientation. Nizami is the unrivaled master of the *masnavi* form not just for poets from the Caucasus, but for Persian literature as a whole. It could even be argued that his *hamsa*—literally, his quintet—made Persian literature into a world literature that could traverse continents, religions, and empires.

Khusrow and Shirin Nizami's *masnavis* were influential everywhere in the Persianate world, but for the Caucasus in particular it would be difficult to overstate their importance. His story of *Khusrow and Shirin* (c. 1177) draws on earlier legends concerning the Sasanian king Khusrow Parviz (r. 591-628) and his beloved Shirin. In Nizami's version, Shirin is depicted as Armenian, although Shirin is described in early historiographic sources as Aramean, meaning that she was from Aram in modern Syria and of Semitic background. In both the historical account of chronicles and the fictional account of Nizami, Shirin is a Christian woman in a world in which the ruling class was Zoroastrian. In addition to *Treasury of Mysteries* and *Khusrow and Shirin*, Nizami's quintet comprises *Layli and Majnun* (1192), which is a Persian remake of the Arabic tale of the 7th century poet Qays ibn al-Mulawwah, *The Book of Alexander* (1194), on the conquests of the Alexander the Great, founder of the Greek kingdom of Macedon, and *The Seven Beauties* (1197), which renders the life and exploits the Sassanian king Bahram V in fictional form.

Mijnuroba, love madness In terms of its subject matter as well as its form, Rustaveli's *Knight in the Panther's Skin* is a Georgian counterpart to the *masnavis* of Nizami. The conceptualization of love as well as the plot structure are clearly borrowed from earlier Persian romances, including those of Nizami. Even the very word for Rustaveli's meter, *shairi*, reflects the influence of Persian, since it is a Georgian adaptation of the Persian and Arabic word for poetry. Similarly, the dominant theme of Rustaveli's story, *mijnuroba* (love madness) is inspired by Nizami's *Layli and Majnun*, in which the male protagonist is assigned a name that reflects his spiritual condition: driven mad by love (*majnun*). *Mijnuroba* is a Georgianized version of the Perso-Arabic word for someone who is driven to madness by his or her love (the *-oba* ending being a Georgian suffix). The word *mijnuroba* entered Georgian culture through Rustaveli's work, and is part of everyday Georgian language to this day. Georgian was one of the earliest literatures to vernacularize the Persian tradition, a process best known through Turkic and later Urdu translations of Persian narratives.

Armenian.

While Armenian poetry was as heavily influenced by the Persian tradition as was Georgian, this influence was manifested in different ways, that did not extend to recreating the *masnavi* form in that language, as Rustaveli did for Georgian.

Grigor Magistros Pahlavuni Grigor Magistros Pahlavuni (c. 990–1058) is, after Narekatsi, among the greatest classical Armenian poets. His major work is a long narrative poem called *Magnalia Dei* that is addressed to the Muslim, Abu Nasr al-Manazi. The poem summarizes the principal events

recorded in the Bible. Grigor's aim was to show that the Bible could rival the Quran, and also adopt a versified form. (Although according to a strict interpretation the Quran is composed in rhymed prose called *saj'* rather than in verse.) It is believed that al-Manazi converted to Christianity soon after reading it. *Magnalia Dei* is important in literary terms for its use of Arabic rhyme (*qafiya*), a practice that initiated a new genre in Armenian literature and which parallels the uses Rustaveli made of Persian prosody in Georgian, albeit with more extensive polemical and theological implications. Grigor was also a translator of many important works of ancient Greek learning, including Plato's *Timaeus* and *Phaedo* and Euclid's *Geometry*.

Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia Soon after Grigor Magistros, Armenian literature split off into two branches: Western and Eastern. The emergence of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia (1080–1198) initiated this split, as the center of Armenian literary culture shifted southwards, to the region of Cilicia in southeast Asia Minor (modern day Adana, Turkey). The fact that Armenian writers of both branches wrote increasingly in their spoken dialects and gradually shifted away from the classical language further consolidated this split.

Hovhannes and Asha Armenian narrative poems, such as Hovhannes Tlgouratzi's (1360-1440) *Hovhannes and Asha*, depicting the love that develops between a Muslim woman and a Christian man, chronicle a world in which close proximity between Muslims and Christians was a feature of everyday life. (Called the poet of love "that is flesh and blood," Tlgouratzi is also the author of two epic poems, one dedicated to Armenian Cilician prince Libarid and another to Gregory of Narek, also known as Grigor Narekasti.) The Christian Qasida of Khaqani Shirvani similarly reveals the entanglement of Muslim and Christian religious traditions throughout the Caucasus.

Frik Alongside Hovhannes Tlgouratzi, other major Armenian poets from this period include Frik (1230-1310), Gostantin Yerzngatzi (1250-1310), and Krikoris of Akhtamar (1484-1544). Frik in particular is noted for his lyric voice, which makes ample use of vernacular speech. Frik was also bold in the object of his critiques, which extended to social inequality and injustice. Unlike most Armenian writers of his era, Frik was a layman without any formal affiliation with or position in the church. Frik's propensity for critique extends to God himself, whom he asks to justify human. Only twenty-seven of Gostantin Yerzngatzi's poems survive, and it is likely that a great many of his poems have been lost. His poems are filled with tropes from Persian poetry, including the nightingale and the rose. Krikoris was an archbishop in the Armenian church, and he used his allegorical imagination to celebrate nature and praise love, while providing ethical instruction to his readers. He was also a scribe and painter of miniatures. His poetry is marked by a strong sense of subjectivity as well as a simple style. He led a difficult life, and was constantly escaping political upheaval and invasions.

Cross-Cultural Connections. In both Armenian and Georgian, literary production declined towards the end of the fourteenth century, due largely to the Mamluk and Timurid invasions of 1375 and 1387. This period and subsequent centuries also witnessed the beginnings of a classical Azeri literature, that was for the first time beginning to acquire written form.

Azeri literature Arguably, the growth of Azeri literature during this century was due in part to the same invasions that account for the decline of Armenian and Georgian. Azeri literature as such did not begin during this period, but the 13th century does mark its written beginnings, although Turkic literature from Central Asia and Kashgar had existed in writing for centuries by this point. The earliest written poems in Azeri are ascribed to Izzeddin Hasanoğlu (d. 1260), who was born in Khorasan. He took the nom-de-plume (*takhallus*) Pur-i Hasan, meaning "son of Hasan." Pur-i Hasan wrote in Persian as well as Azeri and his poems circulated across the Islamic world, including in Egypt.

Izzeddin Hasanoğlu Hasanoğlu was followed by poets such as Qazi Ahmad Boran al-Din of eastern Anatolia and Imad al-Din Nasimi (1369–1417), who was born in Shemakhi but died in Syria. Nasimi was the most famous Azeri follower of the school of antinomian mysticism known as Hurufism (the name refers to the Perso-Arabic term for letters, "*huruf*"). Hurufis engaged in numerological interpretations of the letters of the Perso-Arabic alphabet and incorporated these readings into their poems. Nasimi believed in the primacy of the divine word as a basis of creation, the deification of humanity, and the eventual manifestation of paradise on earth. He was executed for his beliefs in Aleppo. Among his disciples were Refiî î, who wrote two exegeses of Hurufism: *Beşâretnâme* and *Gencnâme*. Many Azeri works relating to Hurufism were translations of Azeri originals. These include

Abdülmeceid Firişteoğlu's Divine Book of Love (*Işknâme-i İllâhî*), which is an Azeri translation of the *Book of Eternity (Javdannama)* of Fazl-Allah Astarabadi, the founder of Hurufism.

Persian and Arabic Overall, post-classical poetry throughout the Caucasus operated under the shadow, first and foremost of Persian poetry, and, more indirectly, of Arabic literary norms and genres. Poetry was produced in Georgian, Armenian, and Azeri often independently of neighboring literatures, yet each of these literatures was responding to the same global trends.

Further Reading

Nizami Ganjevi, *Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance*, translated by J. S. Meisami (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Rebecca Ruth Gould, *Persian Prison Poem: Sovereignty and the Political Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021). Esp. Chapter 2 on the prison poets of Shirvan.

Michael Pifer, *Kindred Voices: A Literary History of Medieval Anatolia* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2021).

Vladimir Minorsky, *A History of Sharvān and Darband in the 10th-11th centuries* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1958).

Vladimir Minorsky, "Khaqani and Andronicus Comnenus," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 11.3 (1945): 550–78.

Discussion Questions

- 1) What is the significance of Khaqani within medieval poetry in the Caucasus?
- 2) What impact did the church exert on the development of medieval Georgian and Armenian poetry?
- 3) What evidence is there of connections, overlaps, and/or parallels among the Georgian, Armenian, and Azeri poetic traditions?
- 4) How did medieval Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani poets negotiate the relationship between oral and written traditions?

DRAMA

Turkic-Armenian Connections: Shadow Plays. The Turkic shadow play tradition was influential across the Caucasus, and has particularly shaped Armenian theatrical culture. This is a form of storytelling that uses flat cut out figures; the movement of the figures and the light source to create effects that impact the narrative. Shadow puppets can be shown walking, running, dancing, or fighting, for example. In the Ottoman tradition, the best known characters are Karagöz ("black eye" in Turkish) and Hacivat. This storytelling tradition spread across the Balkans and into the Caucasus.

Armenians feature in the shadow plays centered on Karagöz and Hacivat, often in a stereotyped fashion, such as in the role of footman or money-changer. There was also a specific character named Ermeni (Armenian) who was known for his fine voice and talent as a musician. Another domain in which the Armenian theatrical tradition borrowed from Turkish theatre is *orta oyunu* (comic theatre or *commedia dell'arte*), in which certain Armenian playwrights such as Hagop Baronian (discussed later) excelled. Since theatre was not part of the literary repertoire of Islamic culture, the absorption of Armenia by Arab empires slowed down the development of Armenia's theatrical tradition. Archeological excavations have however shown that the Armenian theatrical tradition persisted on a smaller scale throughout the Islamic period. Specifically, statues of actors and animal masks have been discovered in the fort of Kaitzun Bert in the Armenian province of Lori. From the 11th to the 14th centuries, theatre continued to be performed in the region of Cilicia.

Armenian Musical Performance. While the theatrical tradition receded in importance during the medieval period, other modes of performance grew in prominence. One example is the traveling minstrel tradition, which goes by many different names across the Caucasus, and has only recently become the subject of sustained scholarly analysis. The Armenian minstrel is known as a *gusan*, a word that is treated as an equivalent to the classical Greek word *mimos* (mime). Songs sung by

gusans are known variously as *yergk vipsanats* (storytellers' songs) and *tvelatsyn yergk* (metrical songs). *Gusans* were drawn from two social classes: feudal lords who performed as professional musicians and illiterate bards who wandered through Armenia, singing popular songs. They recited legends of ancient heroes to instrumental accompaniment, often in opposition to the teachings of the church. Goghtn, now in the modern region of Nakhichevan, Azerbaijan, was a center for medieval *gusans*. During the late medieval period, *gusans* were replaced by other types of musicians, called *ashuq* (variously spelled *ashugh*, *ashik*, *ashek*, or *asiq*, depending on language, time, and context), who specialized in playing the *kamancha* and *saz*. The *ashuq* tradition is shared equally by Azeris and includes such Armenian bards as Jivani, Sheram, Shirin, Shahen, Havasi, and Ashot.

Folk music tradition of Azerbaijan. The folk music tradition of Azerbaijan expanded rapidly during the medieval period, and came to encompass forms such as *gerayly*, *qoshma*, *tajnis*. *Gerayly* involve three to four couplets that follow a strict rhyme scheme that varies from couplet to couplet. The *qoshma* form contains four hemistiches per couplet, and each couplet has eleven syllables. The name (or penname) of lyric's author is given in the last couplet, as in the *takhallus* that concludes the classical ghazal (here it is called *mohurband*). *Qoshma* are organized by content, and include stories (*dastan*), adornment (*gözəlləmə*), narratives extending from the birth until the death of the hero (*vucudname*), and questions and answers or riddle poems (*qifilbənd*), and displays of mastery (*ustadname*).

Armenian-Azeri Connections: The Ashuq Tradition. Performances by *ashiqs* (singers in the *ashuq* tradition) also involved musical forms such as *tasnif*, *ashik*, and *mugham*. The tradition has been active in Armenian and Azeri since the medieval period and, anticipates key features of modern drama. The main difference is the role of music and poetry in the *ashuq* performative tradition. The *ashuq* tradition originated in Azerbaijan towards the end of the 15th century. The word derives from 'ashq, the Arabo-Persian word for a "love" that is as much spiritual as physical, and has been linked to the Turkic poet and mystic, Ahmet Yassawi (1105–1166), who was called an *ashiq*. *Ashuq* songs were also affiliated with the wider narrative tradition of *hikayat*, and can be *Ashuqs* was held to high standards of conduct by their community. 19th century Ashiq Alasgar summarized the *ashiq*'s ethical code of behavior in a famous poem, in which he indicated that the ashik should be knowledgeable, thoughtful, polite. The *ashiq* was expected to tell the truth, even when the audience or people in positions of power did not want to hear it. A single story (*hikaye*) would typically include one hundred or more or songs of three or more stanzas each. One such example is the story of Shah Ismail, founder of the Safavid dynasty, in which this political figure becomes a master of the art of poetry, and of a musical instrument called the *saz*. In this new guise, Shah Ismail became a folk hero.

Ashiqs as protagonists. Many *ashuq* narratives feature *ashiqs* in the story themselves, both as narrators and protagonists. For example, there is a story about an *ashiq* in 16th century Constantinople who overcomes political obstacles and marries his beloved Nur. Yet another important *ashuq* narrative is linked to Ashiq Qarib ("wandering *ashiq*"), an *ashiq* from the 16th or 17th century who wanders through the Caucasus, initially in search of worldly love, but who attains to spiritual during the course of his wandering. This latter story has been the subject of many reenactments, including by Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov, Azerbaijani opera composer Uzeyir Hajibeyov, and Armenian filmmaker Sergei Parajanov. Finally, the story (*hikaye*) of the debate between Ashiq Valeh and Ashiq Zərniyar tells of how Ashiq Zərniyar wins a debate with Ashiq Valeh after forty other *ashiqs* have already lost to him and gone to prison. When Ashiq Zərniyar wins the debate, he frees all the imprisoned *ashiqs* and marries Zərniyar.

Epic of Koroghlu The epic of Koroghlu also involves an *ashuq* figure in the person of Koroghlu, whose story circulated across the wider Ottoman and Turkic world. It is believed to have originated in Azerbaijan, since the oldest written versions are from the region of Tabriz, an Azerbaijani speaking area of modern Iran. Georgians and Armenians developed their own versions of this story. The Azeri version places a special emphasis on Koroghlu as a noble bandit who steals from the rich to give to the poor. This emphasis links the story to other noble bandit narratives in Georgia, Armenia, and elsewhere in the Caucasus, which are often associated with the *abrek*. Interestingly, Koroghlu is himself an *ashiq*, and interrupts the third person narrative by breaking into verse. The opera version of the Koroghlu epic composed by Hajibeyov (discussed below) highlights his talents as a singer.

Mugham Karabakh, Shirvan, and Baku each developed different *mugham* tradition, and the *mugham* was particularly popular in the areas around Baku, Lənkörən, Masallı, and Lerik. From the

16th century onwards, the mugham began to be performed using Persian and Turkic lyric poems (*ghazals*) by poets such as Fizuli, Habibi, and Khatai. Alexandre Dumas attended a *mugham* ceremony in 19th century Shemakhi and was greatly impressed by what he witnessed.

Georgian Ecclesiastical Traditions. Alongside the *berikaoba* festivities, a cult developed around the Christian St. George, which exhibits clear links with pagan practices. On the day preceding St. George's feast, villagers would gather in front of a church, and the women would sing. After the singing was finished, everyone present would bring either a sheep, a bottle of wine, a pastry, or money to the wall, as an offering to St. George. The deacon of the church would sing the wool on the sheep's forehead with a candle, before taking it away to be killed. Meanwhile, men and women would dance, and some women would fall into a trance and utter curses. Although Armenian and Georgian musical culture are influenced by Byzantine hymnography, there are significant differences, particularly on the Georgian side. Whereas Georgian music is polyphonic, meaning that it consists of two or more simultaneous lines of independent melody, the music of the Greek Orthodox church is unisonal, meaning that it consists of only one line of melody. This divergence is explained by the influence of pagan and pre-Christian musical culture on Georgian church music.

Readings:

Victor Belaiev and S. W. Pring, "The Folk-Music of Georgia," *The Musical Quarterly* 19.4 (1933): 417-433.

Sanubar Baghirova, "The One Who Knows the Value of Words": The Aşiq of Azerbaijan," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 47(2015): 116-140.

Amelia Gallagher, "The Transformation of Shah Ismail Safevi in the Turkish *Hikaye*," *Journal of Folklore Research* 46 (2): 173-196.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) How was the *ashuq* tradition disseminated across the Caucasus and how did it bring together Azeri, Armenian, and Georgian cultures?
- 2) With what other genres and modes of literary and performative discourse is the *ashuq* tradition affiliated?
- 3) How did the *ashuq* tradition shape drama and performance culture in the Caucasus?

FICTION

Comparisons. There is no straightforward division between the legends of antiquity in the Caucasus and the legends of the post-classical period. While the themes and tropes that featured in the legends of antiquity were reimagined during the post-classical period and adapted to new circumstances, the basic features of these tales remained constant. As in antiquity, the Caucasus served as an intermediary between literatures further east and European literatures. Since the Caucasus' role as the crossroads of empires greatly impacted its literary culture, the works that combined different cultures are a logical place to begin.

The Georgian Balavariani. Georgian is the language in which the ancient Indian story of Barlaam and Josaphat (Bilawhar and Josaphat), originally linked to the life of Gautama Buddha, reached Europe during the medieval period. The anonymous Georgian version appears to be a translation of an 8th century Arabic version, *Kitab Bilawhar wa-Budhasaf*, which was itself a translation of a Central Asian Manichean version of a Sanskrit Mahayana Buddhist text. The existence of a Georgian version of this work demonstrates that there was a well-developed literary tradition in Georgian throughout the middle ages and that this tradition was in contact with literary developments elsewhere in the world. It also attests to the close links between Georgian Christianity and other Middle Eastern and African early Christianities, since versions of the Barlaam and Josaphat story exist in Persian, Armenian, and Ethiopian version as well as in Georgian. The Georgian version has been preserved in two texts; the long version dates to the 9th-10th centuries and the short one dates to the 11th century. Both versions are included in D.M. Lang's landmark translation (1966). By making use of the Georgian version of the Barlaam and Josaphat story, called *Balavariani*, Lang and other scholars were able to reconstruct the Barlaam and Josaphat tale to its Indian origins. Josaphat's

Georgian name, Iodasaph, is traceable back to the Sanskrit term Bodhisattva, via the Persian Bodisav and subsequently the Arabic form Yudhasaf/ Budhasaf.

Indian connections The Georgian story of Balavar belongs to a wider tradition of ancient and medieval Georgian life-writing and hagiography. Whereas the original Indian version tells of the persecution faced by Gautama Buddha in starting his new religion, in the Christian versions, an Indian king persecutes his son, who converts to Christianity, along with his son's teacher Barlaam, who is responsible for his conversion. The king imprisons his son Josaphat when his court astrologers predict that he will one day convert to Christianity. Ironically, it is while he is in prison that his son meets Saint Barlaam, who persuades him to convert to Christianity. In the end, the king himself finally converts to Christianity. He then appoints his son as successor to the throne and takes up residence as a hermit in the desert. In the end, Josaphat abdicates the throne and also becomes a hermit accompanied by Barlaam.

Barlaam and Josaphat as saints Both Barlaam and Josaphat were canonized as saints in the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church, and later in the Latin Church. The Georgian version is regarded as the first Christianized version of this eastern tale, and it was translated into Greek by the Georgian monk Euthymius of Athos (955–1028). It was through this Greek translation that the Barlaam and Josaphat story was translated into Latin in 1048. From Latin, it entered European literature, and was rendered into Catalan, Provençal, Italian, Portuguese, Old French, Anglo-Norman, Middle High German, Serbian, Croatian, Hungarian, Old Norse, Middle English, and Hebrew. Across its many versions, the core story became spiritualized as an allegory for freedom of the will and the pursuit of inner peace.

Armenian. The sole extant example of a medieval romance in Armenian is *History of Taron*, attributed to the otherwise unknown Yovhannes (John) Mamikonean. Its name notwithstanding, this work is not a history. Rather, it is a romance which narrates in fictional form the Byzantine-Iranian wars during the period when Khusraw II (590-628) was the Sassanian shah and the Armenian region of Taron often experienced invasions from his army. Taron is ruled over by the Mamikonean family, who defend their region from these invasions over five generations. The defenders span the full gamut of human behavior; they are courageous, deceptive, discerning, and wise. Each defender is supported by their patron, St. Karapet. They defend the Glak monastery as well as other Christian churches from destruction by Sasanian invaders. The warriors in *History of Taron* pray not to God or Jesus Christ, but to St. Karapet, who empowers them to prevail in their battles. This work, which the author claims to have compiled between 680 and 681, is considered by scholars to have actually been composed at some point during the 9th-12th centuries, making it contemporaneous with epics such as the Armenian *Daredevils of Sassoun*, Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings*, the Turkic epics the Turkish epics *Danishmendname* and *Book of Dede Korkut*, and the Byzantine Greek epic, *Diogenes Akrites*. *History of Taron* incorporates material from earlier works of Armenian literature, including the 5th century writer P'awstos Buzand and 7th century writer Sebeos.

Mamikonean's style Mamikonean's style is deliberately archaic, and appears to imitate the style of his ancient predecessors. Although the work is called a "history," it cannot be relied on for accurate reports of deaths in battle. Armenians' enemies are systematically demonized in this work, and their historical specificity is merged with mythic traits. Although the enemies are portrayed as Zoroastrian Iranians fighting in the service of Khusraw II, in fact the descriptions likely reflect the invaders of Mamikonean's own day: Arabs and Saljuqs.

Daredevils of Sassoun Armenian oral epics are in different ways similarly preoccupied by Armenian efforts to ward off various Muslim invaders. The most famous oral Armenian epic, the *Daredevils of Sassoun* (*Sasna Dzerer*), transpires across three areas of medieval Armenia (including regions that are now part of modern Turkey): Taron, Moks, and Mush. Set in its current form between the 8th to the 12th centuries, *Daredevils of Sassoun* was forgotten by the Armenian literary tradition (aside from a few scattered references to the epic in the writings of Portuguese travelers) until Garegin Srvandziants, a bishop of the Armenian Apostolic Church, rediscovered and transcribed it in 1873. Publication followed the next year in Constantinople. Prior to its modern transcription, *Daredevils of Sassoun* persisted in the oral storytelling culture of Eastern Armenia, while fading away from Western Armenian literature. Over the course of the 20th century, over one hundred and sixty versions have been recorded. The present form of the epic appears to have been inspired by a 9th century Armenian rebellion against Abbasid rule in Armenia. Yet scholars have argued that its roots

are much more ancient, and date back to the earliest beginnings of the Armenian monarchy, even before writing was widely in use. According to such thinking, the conflicts between Armenian and ancient Mesopotamian rulers was projected onto later conflicts between Armenian and Muslim rules, and the Baghdad Caliph substituted for the Pharaoh of Egypt. Orbeli, for example, suggests that all characters in the epic predate the 11th century.

Hovhannes Tumanyan's version In 1902, Armenian poet and translator Hovhannes Tumanyan retold the story of David of Sassoun in modern Armenian verse. In 1923, the famous Symbolist poet Valery Bryusov translated the epic into Russian. It was translated into English in 1964 by Leon Surmelian, a survivor of the Armenian genocide. Surmelian worked from multiple versions. *Daredevils of Sassoun* has also been translated into most major world literatures.

Four parts Most commonly associated with the name of its hero, David of Sassoun, the full story is comprised of four parts, each of which narrates a different chapter in the vicissitudes of the House of Sassoun across four generations. The origins of this family go back to Assyria and Iranian deity Mihr or Mithra, who is introduced as an ancestor of one branch of the family. The grandson of this deity, Little Mihr, kills a lion who is causing famine and thereby initiates an era of prosperity for the House of Sassoun. His important achievements notwithstanding, Little Mihr has a tragic fate: he slays David of the next generation of the House of Sassoun. Unable to die or to have children, Little Mihr passes his life in a cave known as Raven Rock (Ağrawak'ar), where he awaits the end of the world on a talking horse armed with a sword that flashes lightning. (The figure of the talking horse occurs in Armenian folk tales, such as "King Zazand's Daughter," described above.) Each of the four generations of this dynasty presents new heroes who are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their people.

Georgian-Persian Connections. Medieval fiction and legends in the Caucasus followed the same pattern as poetry in that they were heavily influenced by Persian popular culture. Many masterpieces of Georgian literary prose during this period were adaptations of Persian originals. One such example is Sergis Tmogveli's *Visramiani*, a translation of Fakhr al-Din Gurgani's Persian romance *Vis and Ramin* which was carried out during the reign of Queen Tamar. Like other Georgian literary works of this period, Tmogveli reflects a secular turn within Georgian literature. The Georgian version of this Persian story is important for among other reasons preserving variants of the Persian text which are no longer extant in Persian. But it is also an important work in its own right, and is particularly highly regarded for its florid Georgian prose.

Visramiani Georgian poet Iliā Chavchavadze arranged for the first publication of *Visramiani* in 1884. *Visramiani* was among the first works of Georgian literature to be translated into English; the translation was done in 1914 by the scholar and diplomat Oliver Wardrop, who was the United Kingdom's first Chief Commissioner of Transcaucasia in Georgia from 1919-1921, and is widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in Georgian-British cultural relations. Sergis Tmogveli's work has been a popular subject for lavish manuscript illustrations in the Persianate tradition across the centuries.

Amiran-Darejaniani *Amiran-Darejaniani* by Moses Khoneli is another Georgian text dating to the twelfth century that traverses the Georgian and Persian literary tradition. It is the oldest extant original Georgian romance, and bears the imprint of Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings*. Much like Armenian folk tales, the work contains many magical and mythical creatures, including monsters and *devs*. Khoneli's work served as a precedent for Rustaveli's epic poem *Knight in the Panther's Skin*, which was composed soon afterwards. In fact, the authorship of *Amiran-Darejaniani* is first mentioned by Rustaveli in his epilogue. As a work that work inspired many village storytellers throughout Georgia, Moses Khoneli's *Amiran-Darejaniani* exemplifies how written texts shape oral storytelling traditions. This work inspired many story telling cycles which were passed down by generations of storytellers across Georgia. Although Khoneli's version of *Amiran-Darejaniani* is in prose, his work inspired many later renditions in verse. Both the Armenian *Daredevils of Sassoun* and the Georgian *Amiran-Darejaniani* share in common features of ancient adventure tales from other literary traditions, such as the Arabic tale of the knight and poet Antarah ibn Shaddad.

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Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is the role of the Georgian version of the story of Barlaam and Josaphat in within world literary culture?
- 2) How was the Armenian epic *Daredevils of Sassoun* forgotten and then rediscovered in modern times?
- 3) How were ancient histories reimagined during the post-classical period across the literatures of the Caucasus?
- 4) How did post-classical Armenian and Georgian authors express their Christian identities in a world ruled by Islamic dynasties?

LIFE WRITING

Georgia. The Georgian hagiographic tradition continued to be the dominant strand of life writing in the Caucasus throughout the post-classical and medieval period. During this period, Islam replaced Zoroastrianism as the politically dominant religion alongside Christianity. Beginning in 633, the Arabs began to attack Persian. While the Persian empire declined in power, Tbilisi was briefly placed under Byzantine rule. Between 642 and 651, Arab armies crushed Persian forces. In 655, Tbilisi—referred to as Tiflis by Arabs and Persians, and subsequently by Russians—fell under Arab ruler. Arab-Muslim sovereignty was to remain in place in Georgia for the next five centuries, albeit with significant interludes of Georgian rule.

The Martyrdom of Saint Abo. Abo, a perfumer from Baghdad, is among the best-known Christian martyrs from the early period of Arab-Muslim rule in Tbilisi. He was an Arab by birth who, like Eustace, converted to Christianity while residing in Tbilisi. The narrative of his life and martyrdom by John, son of Saban, is considered a literary masterpiece and has been widely cited in subsequent Georgian literature. Abo was executed by the Arab governor of Tbilisi in 786. The narrative of his martyrdom in Georgian is preceded by a prologue in which John laments the fate of the Georgians under Arab rule. According to John, the caliphs in Baghdad were actively engaged in seeking to convert the peoples of the Caucasus to Islam. John explains that he composed the narrative of the

martyrdom of St. Abo in order to encourage his fellow Georgians to remain steadfast in their loyalty to their religion and their country. As John relates, Abo entered into the service of duke Nersus, then the ruler of Georgia, due to his skill in the arts of perfumery. John reports that Abo was also well versed in the "literature of the Saracens," meaning Arabic. Abo travelled to Georgia with duke Nerses, and initially resided with him. He learned to read and write and speak fluently in Georgian. He then began to read the Old and New Testaments, whether in Georgian translation or in Arabic is not specified. He started attending church and listened to the writings of the prophets and apostles, as they were read aloud in church. He also began consulting with Christian theologians on doctrinal matters. As a result of all these activities, Abo became estranged from Islam and devoted to Christianity. He began fasting and praying to Jesus Christ secretly, and sought for ways of being baptized that would not be noticed by the Muslim rulers, since he feared severe punishment for converting to Christianity.

Arab armies invade the Caucasus In 779, seven years after Abo's arrival in Georgia, Arab armies invaded the Caucasus. Nersus and his retinue, including Abu, fled north, through the Darial Gorge, and into the land of the Khazars. John describes the Khazars in pejorative terms as wild and savage drinkers of blood, who do not adhere to any religion other than a basic monotheism. Although John classifies them as barbarians, he also reports that the King of the Khazars (whom he also calls the "King of the North") welcomed Duke Nerses and his retinue with food and drink and extended to him all the hospitality that local cultural customs required. Grateful to have successfully escaped from the invading Arabs, Abo was baptized and officially became Christian.

Among the Abkhazians After staying in the land of the Khazars for a while, Duke Nerses requests the king's permission to depart for the land of the Abkhazians, which was at that time part of the Byzantine empire. The King of the Khazars agree to the request and the retinue depart on their three-month journey to Abkhazia. In narrating this journey, John contrasts and compares different empires and reveals a pronounced preference for Byzantine rule. Once he is surrounded by the devout Christians of Abkhazia, Abo is further inspired to pursue the path of sanctity. He undertakes a lifestyle that emulates that of St. Anthony the Anchorite (d. 356), a Christian monk from Egypt, who is known for developing an ascetic way of life in the desert. For three months, he prays and fasts intensively, and ceases to speak with other humans. Following this spiritual transformation, Abo has the opportunity to return at long last to Tbilisi. The Arabs have conquered Georgia and replace Duke Nerses with his nephew as the prince of Georgia. Nerses then asks the caliph's representatives in Georgia whether he could safely return to Tbilisi, and they promised to protect him and his retinue on their journey. Abo makes preparations to return to Tbilisi in the company of Nerses. Just before he leaves, the prince of Abkhazia pulls him aside and warns him that his Arab origins will make him a target for persecution.

The Uniqueness of Christian Hagiography. The prince predicts, in other words, that Abo's renunciation of the religion of his forefathers will attract opprobrium that Christians not born to Muslim families might not have faced. We have already seen this theme manifested in *Martyrdom of Eustace of Mtskheta*, in which Eustace's Assyrian friend Stephan escapes persecution for his Christianity because witnessed attested that he had been born into the Christian faith. In both ancient and medieval hagiographies, the riskiest—and, for some outside observers, most treacherous—act is betrayal of the faith of one's forefathers. This insight is unique to Christian hagiography. For the first time in world literature—and world history—betrayal of one's native faith was regarded as a noble act. Partly due to its unique celebration of those who break with the religion of their ancestors, Christian life writing initiated a radical break with earlier biographical traditions, and also became distinguished from much Jewish and Muslim biography. The space that Christianity created for the individual as a locus of meaning, agency, and action is what distinguishes the Christian life writing tradition from its predecessors. As Abo memorably proclaimed when he was warned that his fellow Arabs might persecute him: "I am not afraid of death, since I look for the kingdom of Christ." Abo's insistence on a higher standard that transcends and contradicts general public opinion is a manifestation of his distinctively Christian vision.

Secret conversion When Abo returned to Tbilisi, as predicted, his fellow Arabs were suspicious of his Christian ways. When he had previously resided in Tbilisi, Abo had kept his attraction to Christianity a secret; this time his faith was on full public display. Some Muslim Arabs cursed him. Others threatened him. Yet others gently tried to persuade him to return to the Muslim faith. Abo ignored all of these suggestions and demands. For three years, he went about openly professing Christianity, and no one attacked him. Then, in 785, Abo was arrested and brought before the Arab

ruler of Tbilisi due to his Christian beliefs. Duke Stephen intervened on his behalf and soon afterwards he was released. The persecutions did not end there, however. When the Arab rulers appointed a new magistrate for Tbilisi, Abo's denouncers approached him with a complaint. They pointed out that, although Abo was Arab by birth and brought up in the Islamic faith, he boldly declared himself Christian, and goes about the city, instructing Arab Muslims in how to convert to Christianity. The complainers insisted that Abo should be arrested and compelled to return to the Muslim faith in order to avoid the further spread of the Christian religion.

Abo prepares for death The Christians get wind of these complaints and warn Abo that a mob is hunting for him, in order to arrest, torture and beat him. Abo stoically repeats his early declaration that he is ready to face death for the sake of Christ. He does not change his behavior, and continues to instruct his fellow Arabs in the Christian faith. Finally, Abo is arrested. The magistrate visits him in prison and asks why he has abandoned his native religion and embraced Christianity, since he was born Muslim. Abo explains that he rejected the human-created creed into which he was born in order to embrace the "true faith of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as revealed to him by Jesus Christ." Abo's universalist convictions are historically significant, inasmuch as they reflect aspects of the Christian ethos that are alien to both Islam and Zoroastrianism.

Abo's Martyrdom. Even after his arrest, Abo rejoices. He knows that he will be killed on 27 December, the feast day for St. Stephen, who is venerated as the first martyr of the Christian church. Abo is killed on the day he predicted, by a sword that strikes him three times. His corpse is burned by the Arabs who had complained about him. Abo's relics survive the fire intact. They are stuffed into sheepskin by Christian observers and thrown into the Aragvi River which runs through Tbilisi. As his Georgian biographer writes poetically: "the river became a winding sheet for those sacred relics and the depths of the water a sepulcher for the holy martyr." That night, a torch burns in the spot where Abo's body had been incinerated by his persecutors. It is visible from far away, and attracts Christians from many different corners of the world. Even the attendants of the amir who ordered Abo's assassination are stunned by the light's brilliance. On the following night, the same light shines even more brightly. A light stands like a pillar over the bridge beneath which Abo's relics have been thrown, and both banks of the river are illuminated by this light. All of Tbilisi's inhabitants witness the miracle of the light. The ground on which Abo was killed also became a sacred pilgrimage site, in which Christian mothers could find remedies to heal their children and the elderly could rest in peace. St Abo of Tbilisi's church, named in his honor, now stands on the banks of the Kura River in central Tbilisi, commemorating his martyrdom and securing his status as patron of the city. While the narrative of Abo is largely devoid of miraculous details, the conclusion includes theological interpretation. We are told that, on the day of Abo's martyrdom, God inserted a flaming star that resembled a torch on fire. The torch hovered in the sky for at least three nights. Everyone in the vicinity could see this fire for miles. From a literary perspective, the story of Abo's martyrdom is significant, not only for the story it tells, but for the considerable degree of historical detail and ethnographic depth that it introduces into the narrative. Events are narrated in realistic fashion, with only occasional references to miracles. These realistic features set the work apart from earlier hagiographies, such as the life of St. Nino and of Davit Garesjeli.

Armenian. Meanwhile, in Armenia, a secular autobiographical tradition developed alongside these religious texts. The Armenian polymath scientist and mathematician Anania Shirakatsi (610-685) composed his autobiography as a preface to his scholarly work. In his autobiography, which reads like a curriculum vitae in narrative form, Shirakatsi commemorates the Armenia military leader and teacher Tychicus, who introduced him to Armenian literature and eventually established a school in Trebizond. Tychicus also turned Shirakatsi onto mathematics, and it was in his library that Shirakatsi first became acquainted with Greek authors and scientists.

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Discussion Questions:

- 1) What innovations did Christian conversion narratives introduce into the biographical tradition of Georgian literature?
- 2) What are the range of literary styles that shaped Georgian biographical narratives?
- 3) What are the most common tropes and themes of Georgian Christian hagiography?

ESSAYS

Comparisons. The medieval period was marked by extraordinary growth in both Georgian and Armenian written culture and learning, as well as for Persian literature—poetry and prose—composed in the region of Azerbaijan. Both Georgian and Armenian were shaped by their location within the Persianate literary sphere, just as these literatures had earlier been shaped by their proximity to Greek and Syriac literary traditions. Disciplinary traditions in Persian and Arabic shaped the way in which these disciplines evolved across the southern Caucasus, sometimes in cosmopolitan languages such as Persian and Arabic, and sometimes in local languages like Georgian and Armenian.

Armenian in Azerbaijan. The flourishing of literary culture was accompanied by an efflorescence in other fields of inquiry, including mathematics, philosophy, cosmology, theology, literature, hymnology, and pedagogy. One polymath who excelled in all of these areas is Hovhannes Imastaser (c. 1047–1129) from the village of Pib in the district of Gardman in what is today Nagorno-Karabakh. Kirakos Gandzaketsi's *History of Armenia* contains an extended account of the life of this scholar, who worked in the domains of mathematics, philosophy, cosmology, theology, literature, hymnology, and pedagogy.

Persian in Azerbaijan. Nasir al-Din Tusi (1201-1274) developed an even more diverse set of skills in the domains of mathematics, engineering, logic, rhetoric, and mysticism. With over one-hundred and fifty works to his name, Tusi is among the most prolific scholars in the Islamic world. Although, like Ferdowsi, he was born in Tus, at a time when the city was part of the Khwarzamian empire, Tusi persuaded the Mongol ruler Hulegu Khan to construct an observatory in the ancient city of Maragheh (now in eastern Iranian Azerbaijan). It was from this observatory that Tusi was able to produce the material for his book *Ilkhanic Tables*, the most accurate tables of planetary movements during his era.

Nasirean Ethics Among Tusi's most famous works is the *Nasirean Ethics*, in which Plato and Aristotle are defended and incorporated into Muslim thought. Alongside this ethical treatise, which attempts to synthesize ancient Greek teachings with Islamic ethics, Tusi composed works of Shi'a theology. He also contributed to the study of logic in the Avicennian tradition, and composed a commentary on Avicenna's theory of absolute propositions. In mathematics, Tusi composed a *Treatise on the Quadrilateral*, in which he introduced the science of spherical trigonometry to a Muslim readership.

Tusi in Azerbaijan Tusi's works are renowned throughout the Muslim world, yet Azeris take particular pride in them. He was the subject of a commemorative stamp issued by the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2009. The Soviet astronomer Nikolai Stepanovich Chernykh also named a planet he discovered in 1979 after Tusi. Two scientific institutes have been named in honor of Tusi: the Shamakhi Observatory in the Republic of Azerbaijan and the K. N. Tusi University of Technology in Iran (Tehran Province). Finally, it is believed that Tusi's astronomical research may have influenced Nicolaus Copernicus' theory of heliocentrism.

Armenian. Armenian historical prose overlapped both literary and scholarly domains, combining influences from popular culture with learned ecclesiastical traditions. One of the most significant works within the post-classical Armenian historiographic tradition is the 10th century historiographical work on Caucasian Albania and eastern provinces of Armenia, known as *The History of the Country of Albania* (Պատմութիւն Աղուանից աշխարհի/ *Patmowt'iwn Aghowanic ashxarhi*). This work is a major source of our knowledge concerning the Caucasian Albanian empire. It also provides important information concerning the Khazars. The text is attributed to both Movses



Commented [RRG1]:
A stamp issued in the republic of Azerbaijan in 2009 honoring Tusi
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stamps_of_Azerbaijan,_2009-861.jpg

Kaghankatvatsi and Movses Daskhurantsi because it is believed that Kaghankatvatsi authored books I and II of this work, while Daskhurantsi authored book III and edited Kaghankatvatsi's text for the other two books.

Łewond Łewond is among the most important Armenian historiographers of the 8th century. His history, spanning the years 632 to 789, was commissioned by the son of Smbat VII Bagratuni, the leader of Armenia from 761 to 775, a period during which it was under Arab rule. Łewond's biography is unknown, beyond the fact that he witnessed first-hand the events described after 774. His history is considered a valuable source for the early history of Arab rule over Armenia, and it also sheds light on the Arab–Byzantine wars of the 7th–8th centuries. Among the valuable aspects of the history is its inclusion of a defense of Christianity purportedly sent by the Byzantine emperor Leo III the Isaurian (r. 717–741) to the Umayyad caliph Umar II (r. 717–720), which was later deemed to be a forgery from a later era.

Aristakes Lastivertsı Many more works of Armenian historiography appeared during the later medieval period. These include Aristakes Lastivertsı's 11th century *History: On the Sufferings Visited Upon by Foreign Peoples Living Around Us* (Պատմություն: մեր շրջապատի այլազեղ ազգերից սեզ հասած արհավիրքների մասին/ *Patmowt'yown: mer shrjapati aylacegh azgeric mez hasac' arhavirqneri masin*), which tells of Armenia's relations with the Byzantine empire and with Georgia, as well as the impact of the Saljuq invasions. This work contains a valuable account of the capture of Ani (1064) and the Battle of Manzikert (1071), both of which are major events in Saljuq history. The Armenian monk Mekhitar of Ayrivank of the Cave-Monastery of Geghard composed a history of the world during the 12th century, as well as sacred music.

Kirakos Gandzaketsi Another important post-classical Armenian historian is Kirakos Gandzaketsi, originally of Ganja just like the Persian poet Nizami Ganjevi. Kirakos Gandzaketsi authored a *History of Armenia* during the 13th century. Divided into two parts, this work narrates Armenian history from the 4th to the 12th centuries and includes detailed descriptions of events that took place during his lifetime. The first part opens with the life of Gregory the Illuminator, the first official head of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The second part narrates the Mongol invasions from the point of view of the damage they inflicted on Armenians and other peoples of the Caucasus. Gandzaketsi's work is a key source for the Mongol invasions, and contains the first recorded word list of the Mongolian language. He was captured along with his teacher Vanakan Vardapet by Mongol forces in 1236. Both Gandzaketsi and Vanakan managed to survive during their captivity by working as secretaries for the Mongols. It was through this experience that Kirakos learned Mongolian. When a ransom was paid to free his teacher Vanakan, Kirakos also managed to escape and return to Getik. Following his teacher's death in 1251, Kirakos became the head of the school where he had studied as a child.

Stepanos Orbelian *History of the Province of Syunik* (1297) was one of three major works composed by Stepanos Orbelian. This work is remarkable for the wide variety of sources with which it engages, including sources in Georgian as well as Armenian, and colophons, speeches, and letters. It opens with the creation of the world and then narrates Armenian history from the reign of Armenian king Tiridates I (r. 52-88 CE) to the end of the thirteenth century.

Georgian. While the tradition of Armenian historiography was becoming ever richer and more complex, a multifaceted work entitled the *Life of Kartli* went through many different iterations in Georgian. *Life of Kartli* is a compilation of a series of chronicles of Georgian history composed between the eighth and thirteenth centuries. The canonical text of this work was established only in the beginning of the eighteenth century, following a commission appointed by King Vakhtang VI. The chronicles have been attributed to two specific authors—Leonti Mroveli and Juansheriani—but there were likely other authors as well. Leonti is believed to have been bishop of the diocese of Ruisi Ruisi in Georgia's east-central Shida Kartli region. Juansheriani was a Georgian prince who was descended from the Chosroid dynasty of (Caucasian) Iberia.

Life of Kartli

Although the term Kartli denotes western Georgia, the *Life of Kartli* also narrates Georgia's eastern territories (Kakheti). The chronicles collectively narrate the history of Georgia, from its creation by the mythical Targamos, father of Kartlos and Kavkaz, to the reign of David IV the Builder (1089-1125). The reign of David marked a rare moment in Georgian history: the country had attained military ascendancy over its neighbors, including Saljuq Turks, and was able to incorporate much of

Armenia, the northern Caucasus, northern Iran, and eastern Anatolia into its territory. The security of Georgian borders facilitated the flourishing of Georgian writing and learning, and enabled chroniclers to successively produce the work that became the most important source for Georgian history and for the history of the Near East in general.

Life of Kartli's Structure The first six books of *Life of Kartli* mix legend and history. They tell of Alexander the Great's legendary invasion of the Caucasus, the conversion of Georgia to Christianity by St. Nino in the 4th century, including the role of Jews in bringing Christianity to Georgia, Vakhtang Gorgasali's (r. 452–502) reign amid Sasanian invasions from the south, the death of Vakhtang's descendant Archil in 786, and the destruction of the Georgian monarchy in the 8th century. The remaining books narrate the history of the Georgian Bagratid dynasty and the reign of Queen Tamar (1184-1213). This entire corpus of chronicles and narratives was composed over a period of five hundred years, from the 9th to the 14th century. Among the earliest of extant manuscripts of *Life of Kartli* is the Queen Anna (Anaseuli) codex and the Queen Mariam (Mariamiseuli) of 1633-1645.

Life of Kartli Abridged Before these manuscripts were created, the *Life of Kartli* was abridged into Armenian in the 12th century in a work entitled *The History of Georgians*. This abridgement, which closely follows the Georgian text, focuses on the early period, and heavily condenses the events of later centuries. The earliest extant version of the Armenian abridgement was copied in the late 13th century. In the Venice edition of the Armenian abridgement (published in 1884), the entire work is attributed to Juansheriani, who in fact only authored one of its part.

Divan of the Abkhazian Kings A somewhat later Georgian historiographic document is the *Divan of the Abkhazian Kings*, which is dated to the late 10th or early 11th century, although it is attributed to Bagrat III (1008–1014), the first king of a united Georgia (comprising Kartli to the west and Kakheti to the east), who ruled as king of Abkhazia 978. This work is considered a valuable source for the family relationships among the various Georgian kings as well as for the duration of their reigns, if not for their precise chronology.

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Discussion Questions

- 1) What use did Armenian authors make of Georgian historiography?
- 2) How did Armenian and Georgian authors depict their Muslim enemies?
- 3) What role did historiography play in the formation of Armenian and Georgian identity?
- 4) What were the main disciplines of intellectual activity in the medieval Caucasus and surrounding areas?
- 5) What major scientific advances did Tusi help to bring about?